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World Domination 2001-03 *LDL Marauders*: We Have a Winner

by Jens Kreutzer
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Well, the good news is that after three years, World Domination 2001-03 has finally been brought to a finish. The bad news is that the final round of the Finals, namely the Constructed round, had to be called off because of a lack of player interest. It is understandable, perhaps, that after three years, enthusiasm starts to wane, but we were just 11 matches away from the finish line, so it's really a pity.

Nonetheless, we have a very worthy new **Netrunner** World Champion: Frederic Chorein (France). Congratulations! Here is the final ranking again:

1. Frederic Chorein (FRA) GMP: 7 [OPP GMP: 12]
2. Byron Bailey (USA) GMP: 7 [OPP GMP: 7]
3. Richard Cripe (USA) GMP: 5
4. Scott Berger (USA) GMP: 4 [OPP GMP: 14]
5. Daniel Schneider (GER) GMP: 4 [OPP GMP: 10]
6. Holger Janssen (GER) GMP: 3 [OPP GMP: 14]
7. Mark Applin (UK) GMP: 3 [OPP GMP: 11]
8. Wilfried Ranque (FRA) GMP: 1 [dropped out]

One match of the Constructed round was actually played by Rik Geysels, who replaced Wilfried Ranque, and Frederic Chorein:

Frederic Chorein - Rik Geysels: C10 - R4; R0 - C10.

This would have given Frederic another GMP, cementing his lead position at 8 GMP, but the match was of course disregarded for the final result. Rik has earned some considerable bragging rights for besting the World Champion, though!

In effect, World Domination 2001-03 has become a pure Sealed tournament, and it could be argued that this is actually a good thing. The Qualifiers and Round 1 were also Sealed tournaments, after all—so why play Constructed in the Finals all of a sudden? In that respect, Frederic has truly proven his merit as *Sealed* World Champion. I hope that there are no bad feelings because of the ill-fated Constructed round.

Why was there such a lack of player enthusiasm? Apart from the conflict between committing a whole lot of time to online IRC play and shifting priorities in private life, another reason was given: Players have become so out-of-touch with the Constructed environment that it would take too much effort to deliver cutting-edge deck tech worthy of World Domination. I can see that it would be a let-down if busy players were forced to grab a three-years-old Bartmoss clone and play with that, just because there wouldn't be enough time to develop and playtest new strategies (that incorporated *Classic*, for example). Rather than having a boring Constructed Finals, some players would rather have no Constructed play at all. I can accept that.

Now that we are finished, I would like to thank everybody who helped letting WD 2001-03 happen. This includes all of the players who competed, and also the tournament organizers, directors and judges. Especially the IRC judges proved to be an invaluable help, working countless hours so that other people could play. Thank you! Kudos also go to Douglas Kaufman, who got WD 2001-03 moving, and from who I took over.

The next question to be asked is of course: Will there be another World Domination in 2004 or 2005? First of all, we would need a volunteer who would be willing to organize another WD. I suspect strongly that the age of IRC **Netrunner** is drawing to a close, because the GatlingEngine is so much more convenient for playing, so another WD on IRC probably won't happen. The first **Netrunner** tournaments on CCG Workshop have already been played, and another WD seems feasible to do there. Eric Platel is doing a tremendous job as **Netrunner** project lead, improving the game interface and promoting tournaments. He might be persuaded to organize WD 2004-05, or somebody else might step forward and do it in cooperation with him.

I have some personal thoughts about future World Domination championships which I would like to share. First, I think it would be a good idea to have a pure Constructed WD for a change. Since there is no real "Constructed scene" at the moment due to a lack of competitive meatspace tournaments, nobody really knows which decks are hot and which are not. *Classic* has not yet been fully integrated into Constructed play in my opinion, though Rent-I-Con and Glacier surely are new favorites. By playing a pure Constructed WD, a new Constructed metagame could develop during the Qualifier round and Round 1 (if there was one), which would then form the backdrop for the Finals. This would be a big push for creativity in deckbuilding, I hope, and would definitely show whether the Revised Constructed format is sound. By the way, I think that Revised Constructed deserves to be given another go before we look for alternative formats (like the Draconian Banned List)—it still hasn't had its moment to shine.

The GatlingEngine allows spectators and the saving of games; it has also become rather stable recently. Therefore, it would be adequate as a platform for WD, save for one problem: There is no logging function yet. The dialogue box could be copy-and-pasted, I guess, but since many game functions (like where a card is installed) are visualized only graphically, somebody would have to take notes (probably the judge). I'm of the opinion that WD matches should be properly recorded and made available online (yes, I will get round to doing that for WD 2001-03). There should also be a tight timeframe to boost player morale, perhaps one week per round. This would demand considerable effort on the part of the organizer, so be warned, but it would be a worthwhile effort. Perhaps letting players hang around in the lobby and play round-robin against anybody who happens to show up would be an option, but a judge would also be needed.

Anyway, I hope that you were reasonably content with my managing of WD 2001-03, and I also hope that there will be another WD in the future (which means that I can play too).

Yours, Jens

"Elementary, My Dear Wilson!"
Famous Netrunner Stacks
#17: Poison Pill

by Jens Kreutzer
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with Richard Cripe
input by Daniel Schneider and Nils Kreutzer

"Why I've stopped playing Netrunner? Well, haven't you heard? It's been solved! There's this card that lets you install an ambush node and an agenda in one fort at the same time ..."

—Unidentified shop owner in a TCG shop in Hanover, Germany, 1998(?), who hadn't heard of *Proteus*.

"Worthless."

—Byron "Neal" Massey on Poison Pill.

Bluffing has always been one of the fun aspects of **Netrunner**, and it is perhaps at its most exciting when the Runner is wondering whether that juicy card with six advancement counters on it is an agenda or an ambush node. Your basic advanceable ambush nodes are Corprunner's Shattered Remains, Experimental AI, Vacant Soulkiller and Virus Test Site, which respectively trash hardware, trash programs, do brain damage, or do Net damage. Of the four, Virus Test Site sees the most action because of its low rez cost and high damage yield, but in a normal Constructed game of **Netrunner**, these nodes would merely inconvenience the Runner if run early, and few Corps are willing to dedicate card slots, bits and actions for something that doesn't directly help them win. Shattered Remains, Experimental AI and Vacant Soulkiller seem to be somewhat overpriced for their effects anyway, since the Corp needs to pay both for the advancement counters and the rez cost of 2. Plus, if the Runner sees through the bluff or uses detection, all of the Corp's ambush preparations go to waste.

However, soon after **Netrunner** was published in 1996, players tried to think up a strategy that used ambush nodes as its centerpiece. There are actually several approaches, but all of them have this in common: An ambush node is advanced to a deadly level, and then Runners are forced to either helplessly watch the Corp win or to swallow this "poison pill", which will kill or cripple them. The term was first coined by Len Blado on the Netrunner-L.

The archetypical incarnation of the Poison Pill strategy builds up an ambush node (usually Virus Test Site) to a destructive payload and then uses Namatoki Plaza to install (and score) agendas in the selfsame subfort. These agendas can be advanced at a leisurely pace, since accessing them would also mean accessing the Test Site and thus, game over. That is the theory, anyway.

While the concept seems to be attractive (and fun) enough, there are also several problems here. First, it is true that the Runner can't get at the agendas while they are tucked away in the subfort, but HQ and R&D will be vulnerable. Second, setting up the ambush node and Namatoki takes a lot of time and bits, and until that's done, the Runner can do all sorts of mischief (trashing ambush nodes and Plazas from the central data forts being a favorite). Third, the Runner can easily mess up the Corp's calculations by drawing cards with e. g. Bodyweight Synthetic Blood (BSB) right before the run and unexpectedly surviving the encounter with the node, trashing it in the process. Fourth, and this is the decisive point, a single Runner card like Enterprise, Inc., Shields, Weefle Initiation or Skullcap (or Joan of Arc in the case of Experimental AI) can totally neutralize the threat being posed by the ambush node. The ban on Enterprise, Inc., Shields in the Revised Constructed format addresses this problem only partially.

It is because of these various problems that Poison Pill just isn't viable in the Constructed environment at the time, for which *Proteus* is to blame in part. The conspicuous absence of a decklist for an archetypical Poison Pill might very well mean that it never really worked at all (even in casual play) and that the strategy was only ever speculated on. Here is a deck I put together, using the basic premise:

Basic Namatoki Poison Pill

4	**Fetal AI**
1	**AI Chief Financial Officer**
2	**Priority Requisition**
5	**Virus Test Site**
7	**BBS Whispering Campaign**
2	**Information Laundering**
5	**Namatoki Plaza**
1	**Dieter Esslin**
1	**Lesley Major**
4	**Team Restructuring**
4	**Quandary**
2	**Glacier**
2	**Laser Wire**
1	**Banpei**
1	**Brain Wash**
3	**Neural Blade**
3	**Bolter Cluster**
2	**Liche**

Fetal AI, Dieter Esslin and the ice selection complement the theme of doing lethal Net damage with Virus Test Site. Unfortunately, this deck tends to lose all the time, for the reasons noted above. Richard Cripe elaborates on them:

"The first problem is creating a SDF that will kill the Runner. Now, how much Net damage does it take to do that reliably? Five? Six? Ten? The answer depends on how fast the Runner can draw cards. A determined Runner could just draw cards as his first three actions, then run and soak up the damage in order to get the agenda. So that would be 5 (starting hand) +3 (draws) +1 (to kill him) = 9 damage. But if he has one Jack'n'Joe or BSB, then it goes to ten or twelve damage. If he has multiple Jack'n'Joes or BSB, the number can be as high as 18 (5 starting +12 BSB draws +1 to kill). So you have to be ready and willing to put nine counters on a Virus Test Site. In casual play, you can probably assume that the Runner could use two Jack'n'Joes, so that is eleven damage required, or six counters to be 'safe'. You can't use Team Restructuring for this setup, since it advances the poison pill too slowly. Overall, this means spending six actions and six bits doing nothing but setup. That's at least three turns of actions doing nothing but preparation, while the Runner is doing what Runners do best: disrupting your plans and stealing agenda.

"An alternate option for this is to use Vacant Soulkiller. This way the damage is permanent, and even if they can soak the damage on that run, they will still lose at the end of the turn because of negative hand size. I can't guarantee that this is a

'better' solution, but it definitely discourages the Runner from going there unless it's the last agenda they need to win. It still suffers from Enterprise, Inc., Shields, Emergency Self-Construct, Weefle Initiation, and Skullcap. Both of the above issues can still be modified due to hand-size increasers and/or the various Shield programs etc.

"On a deeper level, there is a problem with making an SDF untouchable: It forces the Runner to run R&D or HQ. If you're spending all this time/money making an SDF invulnerable, you're likely leaving your CDFs open to attack. When this happens, you lose all the upgrades/nodes/agendas you need before you even draw them. Take the sample decklist we just looked at, for example. In that deck, 28 out of 50 cards could be stolen/trashed by the Runner. If R&D is easy to break through, the Runner will just keep running as he trashes or steals cards until he wins. Or he'll rifle through HQ, trashing all the Plazas and stealing all the agendas before they get into the protected fort. Theoretically you could score the AICFO and shuffle your hand back in until you have a 'safe' hand, but then the Runner just plunders R&D while you are wasting actions trying to protect HQ.

"The other inherent problem with this deck (besides being slow and having weakly protected CDFs) is that there is no surprise value. Typically, the Runner quickly catches on and starts preparing what he needs to counteract it. Part of that problem comes from him seeing cards in R&D/HQ and part comes from seeing a card advanced with little to no protection. Overall, the deck concept is too slow and unprotected to even be viable in casual play."

Sadly, it seems that the original Poison Pill idea needs a serious shot in the arm in order to fry some Runners. Without drifting too far away from Poison Pill into the realm of pure ambush decks, the most promising idea seems to be the inclusion of Siren. If there is a Siren in the poison pill SDF, the Runner will have to deal with it before HQ and R&D can be plundered. Obviously, herein lies a connection to the Rio/Siren strategy, but Poison Pill with Siren is still a distinct deck type, as the goal is not to create an un-runnable fort (as is the case with most Siren decks), but rather a fort with Namatoki and the poison pill that must be run before the Runner is able to go anywhere else. It just so happens that the only method of forcing the Runner to actually swallow the poison pill is Siren, so its inclusion is only logical.

Richard Cripe has created three variants of Poison Pill/Siren, which I'd like to present here:

Basic Siren-Namatoki Poison Pill

6 Corporate Retreat
5 Virus Test Site
8 Rockerboy Promotion
3 Siren
3 Namatoki Plaza
2 Off-site Backups
3 Quandary
2 Keeper
1 Haunting Inquisition
2 Data Wall
2 Laser Wire
2 Firewall
2 Rex
2 Banpei
2 Homewrecker™

This first one is the tamest, using Rockerboy as its bit-gaining method (occasionally, Corporate Retreat might join in, but you'll do a lot of installing and rezzing). If the Siren/Namatoki/Poison Pill-SDF gets set up, there is still one problem: Even though Rockerboy does provide some bits, they might run dry if the Runner repeatedly runs another fort, forcing Siren activations, and then jacks out or has the run end. If bits run out in such a situation, Siren can't protect the CDFs or the agenda SDF anymore. The solution is to install expensive "must-break" ice as the outermost ice on the Siren fort, like Homewrecker or Haunting Inquisition. Smacking into that ice four times a turn will either hurt the Runner or be very costly, i. e. impossible to keep up for long. Off-site Backups fetch back parts of the poison pill ensemble that might have been trashed earlier. Of course, the Corp can always fall back on the classic poison pill strategy in a pinch, installing agendas next to a loaded Virus Test Site if Siren doesn't show up. This deck can be fun in a casual environment and doesn't always lose.

Siren-Namatoki Poison Pill
with Olivia/Misleading Combo

6 Main-office Relocation
5 Virus Test Site
3 Siren
3 Namatoki Plaza
2 Olivia Salazar
2 Off-site Backups
10 Misleading Access Menus
2 Keeper
1 Haunting Inquisition
2 Data Wall
2 Laser Wire
2 Firewall
2 Rex
2 Banpei
1 Homewrecker™

One step up the evolutionary ladder, this variant tries to solve the problem of bit-crippled Sirens by using a proactive bit engine. Olivia Salazar can repeatedly rez (and derez) Misleading Access Menus (which needs to be the outermost ice on the Siren fort), giving the Corp bits for each run the Runner makes. The problem is that this further complicates the combo, which now consists of an advanced Virus Test Site, Namatoki Plaza, Siren, Misleading Access Menus and Olivia Salazar—good luck with setting everything up. Apart from that, this might actually work.

However, a sleeker way to go is using Tokyo-Chiba Infighting instead. It is another sure method of avoiding being drained of bits by repeated activations of Siren, and easier to set up than the Olivia/Misleading combo, but nets one bit less per iteration. I came up with the following decklist (see next page), with some bit-gainer operations to help pay the installation and rez costs of the first pieces of ice, as well as advancing the ambush node. Night Shift is probably the operation of choice here rather than Accounts Receivable, because it helps speeding through the deck and assembling the combo pieces Virus Test Site, Namatoki Plaza, Siren and Tokyo-Chiba Infighting. Adjust to taste.

Siren-Namatoki Poison Pill
with Tokyo-Chiba Infighting

6	**Main-office Relocation**
5	**Virus Test Site**
3	**Siren**
3	**Namatoki Plaza**
3	**Tokyo-Chiba Infighting**
2	**Off-site Backups**
5	**Accounts Receivable and/or Night Shift**
2	**Quandary**
2	**Keeper**
2	**Haunting Inquisition**
2	**Data Wall**
2	**Laser Wire**
2	**Firewall**
2	**Rex**
2	**Banpei**
2	**Homewrecker™**

The third stage suggested by Richard is only for the gutsy Corp:

Siren-Namatoki Poison Pill
with CorpNegoCenter

9	**Marine Arcology**
5	**Virus Test Site**
3	**Siren**
4	**Corporate Negotiating Center**
3	**Namatoki Plaza**
3	**Off-site Backups**
3	**Quandary**
2	**Keeper**
1	**Haunting Inquisition**
2	**Data Wall**
2	**Laser Wire**
2	**Firewall**
2	**Rex**
2	**Banpei**
2	**Homewrecker™**

This variant works like the first, but uses Corporate Negotiating Centers as its bit-gainers. Since these are seldom trashed by Runners (they tend to be deluded into seeing them as an asset for showing them juicy agendas in HQ), they usually provide a reliable bit influx each turn, powering the Siren. An early Marine Arcology can also boost the bit pool along. This deck can hold its ground in casual and might just be viable in Constructed, too. Hint: If Homewrecker damages a Runner, go for the MRAM Chips.

Richard puts these decks into the right perspective: “In fairness, all of these still have problems against Emergency Self-Construct, Enterprise, Inc., Shields etc. But by forcing the Runner to deal with the Siren, you thereby protect the CDFs. None of the decks are terribly efficient. None will stand up to real tournament decks. But they do try to force the poison pill down the Runner's throat.” It also helps if the Poison Pill Corp faces a Runner who doesn’t know what’s coming. This is true for any strategy, of course.

Daniel Schneider also gave his ideas on Poison Pill variants, which enterprising Corp players might want to experiment with:

● Play with three Political Overthrows to make the deck more solid and to focus more on killing the Runner than on scoring agenda.

● Play with some cheap deflector ice on the central data forts. Try to use them as surprise. Note, however, that the run flow chart seems to allow the Runner to jack out before accessing the contents of a fort even if there is no ice installed on it. Maybe Jack Attack can help with that?

● Play with World Domination, Falsified Transactions Expert and Overtime Incentives to advance the poison pill node and World Domination simultaneously.

● Play with Namatoki and Chicago Branch or Remote Facility to be on the safe side. This could well mean playing it *too* safe, though.

● Play with additional nodes like Corprunner’s Shattered Remains or Experimental AI in the Namatoki fort or with upgrades like Dieter Esslin to get rid of Emergency Self-Construct, Skullcap and similar cards before letting the Runner access Virus Test Site.

● Play with Lesley Major, or Raymond Ellison (and some useful cards).

In any case, the Poison Pill strategy is fun to play and can make for some very interesting games. I’d definitely recommend trying it out in casual games, and who knows: Maybe a variant that shines in Constructed too is possible after all? Nobody has seriously tried to find that variant since *Classic* came out.

Philip Bishop on the *Dioscuri*

by Philip Bishop
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edited by Jens Kreutzer

I didn’t get much feedback on the Dioscuri cards that were published in recent issues of the Top Runners’ Quarterly, but Philip Bishop took the trouble and sent me a rather long email with his comments. I also think that the Dioscuri need much work, but read for yourselves what Philip wrote. His ideas really open up some new directions for creativity.

I’ve read the articles relating to the “Dioscuri”, which have been virtually proposed, and I see a shortcoming in their current implementation: In the other faction-based games I have played, factions did one of two things (if a faction did not do this, it was, to put it bluntly, a poor and rightfully underplayed faction): the faction either

1) helped by boosting a current win strategy that was underdeveloped

or

2) helped stop a currently “broken” win strategy that was overdeveloped.

Of course, specialization breeds weakness, so those factions bent only on stopping a very specific victory condition (or

more appropriately, another specific faction) were virtually useless on account of their not being able to stand up “toe-to-toe”, so to speak, against anything outside of their narrow range of focus. Finally, factions need to be internally balanced as well as externally balanced. By internally balanced, I mean the “faction card” itself must have counterbalancing advantages and disadvantages as well as external synergy, by which I mean balanced with the entirety of cards available to play with. The Dioscuri I’ve seen either (properly) halt a too-powerful win strategy for the opposition, or (improperly) attempt to advance a non-victory oriented goal (such as hoarding hardware). The former I applaud, the later I abhor. That said, I have put some thought into the concept and come up with some balancing factors.

Runners:
These should be famous Runners from **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.**, not the blandly-named psuedo-entities they are currently. The basic element a veteran Runner would have is starting equipment, therefore instead of just starting with 5 bits, some Runners start with more (and here is the addition) which may be spent on hardware/resources/programs to begin the game with. While this may appear unbalancing, understand that this will always come at a price (and after all, 5 bits won’t buy much in today’s black market).

The balancing feature a Runner Dioscuri would have is brain damage to start with. Since veterans have been running against ice for a while, it is safe to assume some of them have had their “cortical scrubbed” one too many times. That said, a variable will appear on any Dioscuri card, called EKG (their starting hand size in another manner of speaking). A high number would represent a fresh weef (or cybered-veteran) who has more fresh grey matter to work with. A lower number would represent one or more encounters with some black ice.

The next feature on a Runner would be a Runner’s starting MU. The base value of 4 is a bit stale, and doesn’t represent the economic differences among Runners. Some Runners start their career with hotter decks (5 MU+), and others have had their sweet systems trashed by one too many run-ins with Cinderella and have to work with last generation’s tech (3 MU-). Combined with intelligent opening program purchases, this can make a Runner a dangerous thing in the first turn. Veteran runners, who have been around for a while, have more connections than your average weef, therefore no “blanket” abilities apply any longer, aside from declaration of a run. Each runner’s abilities will be different, and may vary widely. An old veteran may have “A,A: gain 3 bits” or even “A: draw 2 cards”, while your average Runner would have the normal “A: gain 1 bit” and “A: draw one card”.

Finally, something I’m amazed was not in the game to start, is a Runner’s base link and link boost. This will come at a price far greater than your average link card, so it still behooves the runner to aquire a link. Examples would be “3: base link 1” and “3: +1 link” or something to that effect. While this starting link isn’t cost effective, it may save the Runner’s behind in a pinch (as well as being immune to trashing).

If a Runner appears terribly underpowered, starting agenda should rocket them back up into contender status. A Runner Dioscuri should never have more than one agenda point to start the game (just enough to pay for all the fun stuff, and not enough to write home about) on account of obvious abuse potential, and then only if they are terribly underpowered. All of this sounds dandy, but the more “positive” abilities a Dioscuri would have, the more drawbacks. The veterans may have better connections and tech, but most of them have quite a few mental scars and some have a hard time motivating themselves to gain bits the old-fashioned way (perhaps “A,A: gain 1 bit”). This of course requires thought and playtesting to ensure balance.

Corps:
Last, but far from least is the Corp side of the Greek twins of **Netrunner**. The Corp Dioscuri (as you proposed) should be named after some nasty **Netrunner** Corps, and as such should reflect that Corp as much as possible. The number one balancing factor for a starting Corp would be starting publicity (while this sounds like a good thing, it is starting *bad* publicity). This number should never be very high (1 or 2 points should be nasty enough), but I feel almost every Corp Dioscuri should have bad publicity to start. What this does is it counterbalances the current strength of corporate fast advance by bringing the bad publicity threshold of seven a bit closer to reach. While two bad publicity points by no means ruin a Corp’s game, it definitely encourages them to beef up defences before attempting “fast advance” on account of the very real threat of a good round of Scaldan virus infecting their mainframes.

OK, that said, on to the fun stuff. Since these Corps have (typically) been around for a while, they also have more starting bits (more than 5), as well as starting with *rezzed* ice. All normal costs apply, and only starting bits can be used to purchase this ice. Every ice costs one more than its normal cost (to account for those pesky zero-cost pieces of ice) and no rez benefit comes from starting ice (since it was never “rezzed” manually). Antipodally, the normal “nesting” cost does *not* apply. This represents the ever-present defences of any Corp, as well as the known ice from *Ice and Data*. While starting bits won’t get many Corps impenetrable defences, they definitely won’t be shabby either. An intelligent player can have their central forts protected adequately while starting the game with no bits, or moderately defended with some bits to spare.

Another new addition would be infrastructure, a statistic that represents larger corporations by giving them a larger HQ (i.e. larger hand size) to begin the game.

Minimum deck size: Older Corps realized the glaring problems of a shallow R&D and therefore have imposed new policies that ensure this will not happen. Those new policies are a minimum deck size, and the corresponding minimum number of agenda points in R&D. Hopefully, this will “slow down” Corp draws by gumming up the works with superflous cards as well as protecting from “one-hit R&D runs”. Anything can help in the current environment.

Finally, there are corporate abilities. These will represent the nature of the Corp and may vary as widely as “All black ops agenda difficulties are reduced by one” for Arasaka, or “A, A, A: gain 6 bits” for some new, up-and-coming corporation (that somehow avoided being devoured by the older predators). I personally would avoid handing out starting agenda points to corporations, unless they were counter-balanced by double that amount in starting bad publicity, on the obvious abusability of a Corp realizing they only need two three-point agendas (or worse, a three- and a two-point one) while being fully aware that their opponent still needs seven (and therefore only playing with multiples of 3, forcing the runner to score three agendas while they win with two). Just a thought.

Finally, I think adding a statistic to Runners and Corps alike would be one final balancing tool: agenda point requirement. This would represent outstanding debts (say to Arasaka?) or a lagging corporate structure in need of a cash influx. Effectively, this number (starting at 7 and going up) would make the more "beefed" Corporations/Runners a bit slower. While this may encourage the old Tag'n'Bag or a resurgence of Big Dig, I'm not so sure that it is such a bad thing (considering current Corp defensive abilities and penalties for harming Runners). I think this addendum to the current Dioscuri discussion would benefit the R&D of more beneficial and useful Dioscuri.

Did You Know?

Bits and Pieces from the NR Trivia Collection

#17: Raffles

by Jens Kreutzer
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A staple icebreaker from the earliest days of **Netrunner**, stately Raffles is still the "biggest" code-gate breaker in the game. Though players usually shun the installation cost of seven bits and go for favorites like Skeleton Passkeys, Raffles still sees enough play in Sealed games and in stacks where installation costs don't matter that much (using Zetatech Software Installers or Mystery Box, for example). Apart from that, the card is more bread-and-butter **Netrunner**, not fancy stuff.

It is, however, a program that was directly adopted from the **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.** roleplaying game, which lent its background to the **Netrunner** universe. In the second-edition basic rulebook on page 137, we can find the following description: "Raffles is designed specifically to deal with complex code gates and file locks which have a specific word as the key. It asks the code gate a series of innocuous and leading questions ('Is is bigger than a breadbox?' 'Is it hot or cold?'), designed to tell Raffles the nature of the code gate and its key."

Raffles and Tinweasel share similar card artworks by Mark Collen, showing a question mark-shaped creature holding up a flat image of a person in front of the same stylised padlock. Obviously, the padlock represents the code gate to be broken, but the question mark might either be the icon of a Runner using the icebreaker, or it might be some sort of guardian icon posing the question that must be answered with the correct answer (password) in order to enter the code gate. Instead of an image of the password, the guardian icon gets handed an image of Tinweasel or Raffles, respectively. On Raffles, the icon description from **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.** (page 138) is represented faithfully: "A dapper young man wearing evening clothes of the early 1900's. It speaks briefly to the door, then vanishes as soon as it opens."

But what does the name *Raffles* mean? As always, the Oxford English Dictionary is the authority to turn to. If written with a small r, *raffles* means "lottery", hence the French translation of the card, "Loterie". But here, I think, the French translator got it wrong, since *Raffles* (with a capital R) also means "a man of good birth who engages in crime, especially burglary". This goes back to A. J. Raffles, the protagonist of *Raffles,The Amateur Cracksman* (1899) and other books by E. W. Hornung (1866-1921). Raffles was a gentleman thief in Victorian England, which explains the artwork on the card.

The following is a quote from the 1994 Wordsworth Classics edition of *Raffles, The Amateur Cracksman* (p. 15-18) to give you an impression of his modus operandi. This book is an enjoyable read, by the way, which I'd like to recommend. The story is told from the perspective of Bunny Manders, Raffles' partner in crime. We join them as they are burgling a jeweller's.

"Next moment I saw the door wide open, and Raffles standing within and beckoning me with a jemmy.

'Door number one,' he whispered. 'Deuce knows how many more there'll be, but I know of two at least. We won't have to make much noise over them, either; down here there's less risk.'

We were now at the bottom of the exact fellow to the narrow stone stair which we had just descended; the yard, or well, being the one part common to both the private and the business premises. But this flight led to no open passage; instead, a singularly solid mahogany door confronted us at the top. 'I thought so,' muttered Raffles, handing me the lantern, and pocketing a bunch of skeleton keys, after tampering for a few times with the lock. 'It'll be an hour's work to get through that!'

'Can't you pick it?'

'No. I know these locks. It's no use trying. We must cut it out, and it'll take us an hour.' It took us forty-seven minutes by my watch; or rather it took Raffles, and never in my life have I seen anything more deliberately done. My part was simply to stand by with the dark lantern in one hand and a small bottle of rock-oil in the other. Raffles had produced a pretty, embroidered case, intended obviously for his razors, but filled instead with the tools of his secret trade, including the rock-oil. From this case he selected a 'bit,' capable of drilling a hole an inch in diameter, and fitted it to a small but very strong steel 'brace.' Then he took off his covert-coat and his blazer, spread them neatly on the top step – knelt on them – turned up his shirt-cuffs – and went to work with brace-and-bit near the keyhole. But first he oiled the bit to minimise the noise, and this he did invariably before beginning a fresh hole, and often in the middle of one. It took thirty-two separate borings to cut round that lock. I noticed that through the first circular orifice Raffles thrust a forefinger; then, as the circle became an even lengthening oval, he got his hand through up to the thumb, and I heard him swear softly to himself. 'I was afraid so!'

'What is it?'

'An iron gate on the other side!'

'How on earth are we to get through that?' I asked in dismay. 'Pick the lock. But there may be two. In that case they'll be top and bottom, and we shall have two fresh holes to make, as the door opens inwards. It won't open two inches as it is.' I confess I did not feel sanguine about the lock-picking, seeing that one lock had baffled us already; and my disappointment and impatience must have been a revelation to me had I stopped to think. The truth is that I was entering into our nefarious undertaking with an involuntary zeal of which I was myself quite unconscious at the time. The romance and the peril of the whole proceeding held me spellbound and entranced. My moral sense and my sense of fear were stricken by a common paralysis. And there I stood, shining my light and holding my phial with a keener interest than I ever brought to any honest avocation. And there knelt A. J. Raffles, with his black hair tumbled, and the same watchful, quiet, determined half-smile with which I have seen him send down over after over in a country match […]. At last the chain of holes was complete, the lock wrenched out bodily, and a splendid bare arm plunged up to the shoulder through the aperture, and through the bars of the iron gate beyond.

'Now,' whispered Raffles, 'if there's only one lock it'll be in the middle. Joy! Here it is! Only let me pick it, and we're through at last.'

He withdrew his arm, a skeleton key was selected from the bunch, and then back went his arm to the shoulder. It was a breathless moment. I heard the heart throbbing in my body, the very watch ticking in my pocket, and ever and anon the tinkle-tinkle of the skeleton key. Then – at last – there came a single unmistakable click. In another minute the mahogany door and the iron gate yawned behind us, and Raffles was sitting on an office table, wiping his face, with the lantern throwing a steady beam by his side.

We were now in a bare and roomy lobby behind the shop, but separated therefrom by an iron curtain, the very sight of which filled me with despair. Raffles, however, did not appear in the least depressed, but hung up his coat and hat on some pegs in the lobby before examining this curtain with his lantern. 'That's nothing,' said [h]e, after a minute's inspection; 'we'll be through that in no time, but there's a door on the other side which may give us trouble.'

'Another door!' I groaned. 'And how do you mean to tackle this thing?'

'Prise it up with the jointed jemmy. The weak point of these iron curtains is the leverage you can get from below. But it makes a noise, and this is where you're coming in, Bunny; this is where I couldn't do without you. I must have you overhead to knock through when the street's clear. I'll come with you and show a light.' Well, you may imagine how little I liked the prospect of this lonely vigil; and yet there was something very stimulating in the vital responsibility which it involved. Hitherto I had been a mere spectator. Now I was to take part in the game. And the fresh excitement made me more than ever insensible to those considerations of conscience and of safety which were already as dead nerves in my breast. So I took my post without a murmur in the front room above the shop. The fixtures had been left for the refusal of the incoming tenant, and fortunately for us they included Venetian blinds which were already down. It was the simplest matter in the world to stand peeping through the laths into the street, to beat twice with my foot when anybody was approaching, and once when all was clear again. The noises that even I could hear below, with the exception of one metallic crash at the beginning, were indeed incredibly slight; but they ceased altogether at each double rap from my toe, and a policeman passed quite half a dozen times beneath my eyes, and the man whom I took to be the jeweller's watchman oftener still, during the better part of an hour that I spent at the window. Once, indeed, my heart was in my mouth, but only once. It was when the watchman stopped and peered through the peep-hole into the lighted shop. I waited for his whistle – I waited for the gallows or the gaol! But my signals had been studiously obeyed, and the man passed on in undisturbed serenity. In the end I had a signal in my turn, and retraced my steps with lighted matches down the broad stairs, down the narrow ones, across the area, and up into the lobby where Raffles awaited me with an outstretched hand.

'Well done, my boy!' said he. 'You're the same good man in a pinch, and you shall have your reward. I've got a thousand pounds' worth if I've got a penn'oth. It's all in my pockets. And here's something else I found in this locker; very decent port and some cigars, meant for poor dear Danby's business friends. Take a pull, and you shall light up presently. I've found a lavatory, too, and we must have a wash-and-brush-up before we go, for I'm as black as your boot.'"

It doesn't take much imagination to view a Netrun before one's inner eye when reading these lines. Doors and iron gates are dealt with one after the other, just like pieces of ice are rezzed and encountered. The stealth connection is also there. If you'll forgive the pun, I found it hilarious that Raffles "selected a bit" in order to crack the lock.

A film starring David Niven was made about the life of the gentleman-crook Raffles in 1939. It was re-published on VHS video in 1996, so you have a chance of getting hold of it if you prefer films over books.

By the way: The famous Raffles Hotel in Singapore (www.raffleshotel.com) is named after another Raffles, namely Sir T. Stamford Raffles (1781-1826), the founder of Singapore. Also named after him is the Rafflesia plant, or stinking-corpse lily, a south-east Asian rainforest parasite which produces the largest flower in the world. Anyway, now you know the background of the largest codegate breaker in the world of **Netrunner**.

You Know You've Played Too Much Netrunner When …

by Tod T. Fox and others
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edited by Jens Kreutzer

Yes, there was a time when playing too much Netrunner was seen as a realistic prospect, unlike nowadays, when you're happy about each and every game you get away with. I've filched a humorous file compiled by Tod. T. Fox (posted to the Netrunner-L on August 6, 1996) from the archives and reprinted those contributions that have weathered the time best. I hope you still get a chuckle out of these, even if you've seen them before.

You know you've played too much Netrunner when ...

... if you forget your logon password, you reach into your pack and start looking for an Inside Job.

... the first thing you think of after placing a call to the help desk is how many bits you are going to risk on Social Engineering.

... every time you type "Department" in an inter-office memo, you consider adding "of Truth Enhancement."

... a political commentary on TV mentions a politician's agenda and you raise a suspicious eyebrow.

... you are going to the local ice-cream stand and wonder if you have enough bits to rez your ice-cream cone.

... you refer to pyramid schemes as Rigged Investments.

... you think of going to work as spending actions at your bit-gainer node.

... you try to pay for everything in small glass pebbles.

You know you've played too much Netrunner when ...

... you invest in an armored fridge.

... you're scoring 50 times a day, but not with your girlfriend.

... every time your modem drops carrier, you call the fire department.

... you calculate meat damage every time you see violence on TV.

... you start calling annoying people "weefle."

... you start to call your best friend Neal.

... you start to call your second best friend Wilson.

... you think Netscape will crash on a one on a die.

... if someone says "Excuse me - that's my beeper," you flinch.

... whenever little kids are playing tag, and one of them comes too near you, you shoot him.

... after eating a sufficient number of glass beads, you suddenly have the ability to lift small cars above your head.

... every time anyone in close vicinity to you rolls a three on a die, you begin to twitch and roll on the floor in agony.

... you rename your cat "Chimera."

... you rename your Dog "Cerberus."

... you start reading every card backwards (including baseball and Football cards) just to see how many of them have Larry Niven's name in them.

... you know the difference between a Daemon and a Demon.

... you rent Cinderella, and suffer 2 meat damage in addition to the 10 brain damage that one normally suffers from watching a Disney movie. And your VCR breaks.

... you stick your finger in a light socket to try and build up a resistance to "Net damage."

... the guy at the computer store asks you why you always call him Mantis.

... your dad asks you why you always call him Neal.

... your big brother asks you why you always call him Leland.

... you say "frack!" just a little too often.

... you know what A.P. stands for.

... you go to the City Hall basement closet every Thursday.

... you snicker silently to yourself as you hide a Butcher Boy in your safety deposit box at the bank.

... your wife asks you why you always throw away a certain number of glass beads whenever you flip pancakes.

... you put out a personal ad that says, simply, "Wanted: Technician Lover."

... you find the following absolutely hilarious: 000111, 0110110. 011001010, 110100010? 00111011101, 1110101100010!!!!

... when you wake up every morning, you have to rez your lymph nodes.

... there are not enough actions in the day for all you want to do.

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